

The Dreicer Primitives

A Great Inspiration Out of the North

By Royal Cortissoz

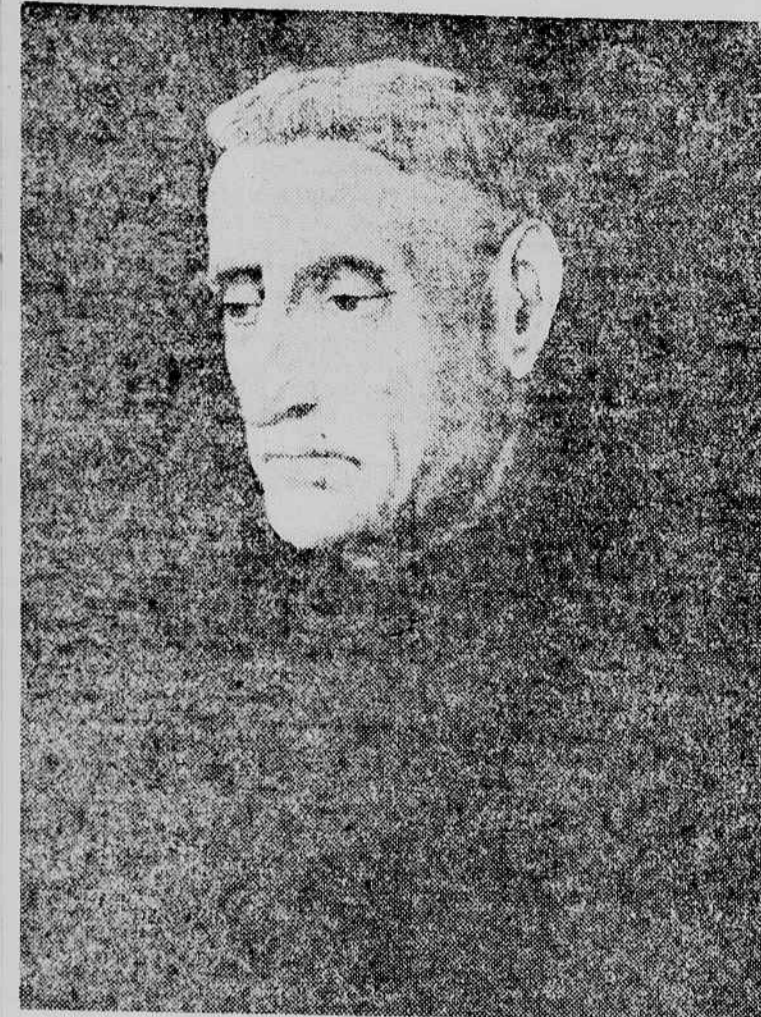
The activities of the art season have slowed down, but the Metropolitan Museum, fortunately, maintains the interest of the subject at concert pitch. What prodigious cosmos it is! Something always happening there. The other day it was announced that Mr. James F. Ballard, of St. Louis, had given outright the priceless rugs which were placed on exhibition last October. The Dreicer bequest, made a year ago, has just been put permanently on view. Among the Italian pictures there now hangs a beautiful Carpaccio which Mr. Kahn has loaned. In every department there is every month a new gift or purchase to be recorded. As we have remarked before, the museum's "Bulletin" must make painstaking reading for European curators. They note our acquisition of a cameo piece of medieval glass, or a fine Gothic statue, or a French sixteenth century cabinet, or a sheaf of new prints. They see the tide flowing into the Metropolitan's doors as it hardly ever flows within their own. It is no wonder that they grow restless or that meetings are held in England with a view to bringing this tide to a pause. We have heard a dealer in masterpieces say that, personally, he would be glad to see the treasures of the old historic houses retained in their original homes. It is a natural feeling, one with which every discerning lover of art must sympathize. Yet there is something to be said for the hypothesis that works of art are the true ambassadors of culture, best fulfilling their destiny in passing from hand to hand, from country to country, enriching men's minds as they go. The thought comes home to us with particular force in looking at the paintings and other objects collected by the late Michael Dreicer. They are a peculiar value as contributing to the establishment of sound ideas of art. The arts they illustrate have already been well represented in the museum, but in their isolation they make a specially potent appeal.

Early Flemish Art

Its Lesson of Sincere Emotion and Sound Workmanship
Coincidences are sometimes benevolent. Just at a time when the installation of the Dreicer bequest reveals a great school there appears a book which is exactly framed for the student of the subject. It is "The Van Eycks and Their Followers," by Sir Martin Conway, published by E. P. Dutton & Co. in a well illustrated quarto. The author wrote the first editions for it thirty years ago, and then his labors have been familiarly inquired in this field, to which he repeatedly made invaluable contributions. In the present volume he merges a little host of masters, merging their works in the light of that modern scholarship has brought to bear upon their history. In our researches have been fruitful and all that he has to say is set forth in a singularly modest and stimulating way. We do not know a more useful

and the beginning of the fifteenth century. King Charles V of France; Louis, Duke of Anjou; Philip the Hardy, Duke of Burgundy, and John, Duke of Berry. These men erected buildings, caused tapestries to be woven, ordered the illumination of manuscripts, commanded the carving of statues and the painting of pictures. Court as well as church must be constantly reckoned with in the

Portrait of a Monk



(From the painting by Roger Van Der Weyden at the Metropolitan Museum.)

background of early French and Flemish art. Sir Martin gives due attention to both, and, in fact, steadily relates his artists to the religious, social and political life of their time. Also he is careful to expose the exact status of the artist. One of his most interesting chapters is that sketching the character and significance of the guild system. In this he says:

"No man could work for pay in a town unless he was in the service of the prince, or was a freeman of the town. Moreover, he was not allowed to exercise a trade unless he belonged to the guild of that trade. It was only as a member of a constituted guild that a workman occupied a recognized and stable position. In the socially constructed Middle Ages, independent units were regarded with little favor. Every man had to join a recognized association before he could secure his rights, and every association not only conferred rights but exacted the fulfillment of

unobtrusively and hard, and their work was first of all good and next beautiful. That, at any rate, was the intention which the painters' guilds had in view—to secure good and honest work on the one hand and to secure just and prompt payment for it on the other. The guild, therefore, intervened in the education of the youthful artist. The lad had to be bound apprentice for a series of years to a recognized master of the craft, who from that day forward stood to him very much in the relation of parent to child. The master was responsible for the apprentice's education, moral and technical. The boy lived under his roof, served him at table, and about the house, and had to fulfill his bidding in all respects. The master, on the other hand, was bound to give him instruction in all matters connected

with his craft. He was also regarded as responsible for his moral and religious education. That this duty was seriously regarded is shown by the following entry in the diary of Neri di Ricci on the occasion of his receiving an orphan as apprentice without premium: "To accomplish this charity and for him this good, I took him to be my spiritual son, with intention and desire to make him virtuous and obedient and to teach him to live in the fear of God."

"The methods of painting in those days included numerous processes. The artist had to know how to prepare his panel and what should be the nature and quality of the wood. He had to be able to prepare and lay on the coating of fine plaster or gesso, which formed the ground upon which the colors were laid. The evenness of this coating and the firmness with which it adhered to the wood were important for the durability of the picture. Further, he had to know how to make every implement and every color he wanted, for there were no artists' material shops in those days."

An apprenticeship lasted for a good five years, and even then the youth emerged not as a full artist but as a journeyman. To pass from that plane to the rank of a master craftsman it was necessary to give the appointed officers of the guild abundant proof of abilities, to take solemn oaths of honesty and to promise that the candidate's work would be done "in the sight of God." And ever after the guild kept an eye upon its member, no matter how brilliant he might be. His materials were watched over, and when he made a contract he had to register it in the guild's books. There was no end to the laws and restrictions under which an artist functioned in the Middle Ages. Sir Martin shows you the results in his analyses of the Van Eycks, Roger Van der Weyden, Hans Memling, Gerard David, and so on through a resplendent list, ending with Lucas Van Leyden and Peter Breughel. His book is stored with facts clarifying the records of these masters. It contains much information and many suggestive judgments for the specialist. But if we mention the work here it is chiefly to commend it as an introduction to the genius of early Flemish art, to its spirit as well as to its documentary annals.

There is one more passage in Sir Martin's book which we may cite in approaching the Dreicer Primitives. "Medieval art," he says, "like medieval religion, reflected every side of life and tried to express the many moods and humors of men. Just as folk-festivals and religious solemnities followed one another in the same building, alike under saintly and angelic patronage, so art changed from grave to gay, from serious to grotesque, in the faith that the eyes which regard mankind from Eternity's stillness look with equal favor upon hours of merriment and of worship, and find as much to approve in the labor of a man's hands as in the emotions of his puzzled heart. The life of Christ, the Gothic mind, was a permeating influence throughout all human life. The husbandman at his plow and the churchman at his prayers were both performing a religious function." Such a point of view makes, above all things, for an artless candor. We have indicated the importance of this collection to the study of art to-day. It enforces nothing more conclusively than the virtues of simplicity and truth.

The Italian Primitive, apart from the mystical impulse which often moved him, instinctively gravitated toward grace and beauty. A certain sensuous

delight in form creeps into his art. He may be naïve, but he is aware of charm. He is aware of it in the visible world, and, consciously or unconsciously, he gets it into his picture. The Flemish Primitive keeps his eye on the object with a passionate fidelity to just the observed fact. Though the "Christ Appearing to His Mother" by Roger Van der Weyden is not without spiritual elevation, its essential merits are nothing if not tangible, the beauties of craftsmanship rather than those of creative design. But the vivid light thrown upon this subject by the Dreicer pictures is thrown by the portraits, the "Man With an Arrow," by Memling, or the "Portrait of a Monk," by Roger Van der Weyden. With superb concentration these paintings reproduce the niceties of structure, the bony fabric underneath the skin, the form of an ear, the modeling in a brow. To pursue the matter compare either of them with the lovely profile, "The Infant St. John," by Piero di Cosimo. In going from the north to the south you are entering a new world. In his drawing of the face and hair Piero di Cosimo is urged unmistakably by a tradition, the Florentine tradition of beauty. Memling and Van der Weyden are ennobled utterly of the fact. It is not subject that makes the difference; it is the spirit of the painter.

It is an austere spirit, not the spirit of the desert, not the spirit of religious asceticism, but the spirit of an art resting with Northern matter-of-factness upon what it could see and touch and handle. And what of beauty? The beauty here is the beauty that comes out in magnificent workmanship, the beauty of the true "rectitude of art."

There is a great deal that might be profitably particularized in a survey of the Dreicer collection. We are sorely tempted to go over its treasures one by one, to talk about the beguiling sweetness of Domenico Moreni's "Miracle of St. Dominic," or the kindred quality in the two martyrdoms by Simon Marmion, or the romantic glow of El Greco's "Holy Family,"—strayed oddly into this company of infinitely more self-contained and polished types. Then there are the Gothic sculptures, the Renaissance bronzes, and, in a place by itself, the glorious early sixteenth century tapestry. The room is very rich. But the best clue to its all-embracing magic is that at which we have glanced in touching upon the simple integrity of the northern Primitives.

It includes, in the first place, sincerity and truth. It implies a firm hold upon the facts of life. Then it develops honest construction, honest modeling and draftsmanship, pure color—in a word, the very life and breath of good technique. A super-

personal conception of the Dreicer bequest would define it as one of "museum pieces," historical in interest. It is all of that, but it is also much more. It drives straight at some of the problems of the present day. It exalts the fundamental laws of art. Let the reader reflect for a moment upon the influence of that guild system on which we have cited Sir Martin Conway. It involved a terrific discipline—and it produced some of the noblest masters in the history of European painting. Do not the pictures that commemorate it rebuke the egotism and incompetence which modernism would foist upon American art? Do they not recall us to an ideal which is not, after all, peculiar to the Low Countries of the Middle Ages, but which exhales from the masterpieces of all the great schools? The Dreicer Primitives are to be enjoyed for their own sake, simply as so many examples of beautiful painting. Also they are serviceable to us as a corrective, a tonic.

The thirty-fifth annual exhibition of the work of students of the Pratt Institute School of Fine and Applied Arts will be opened in the main building in Brooklyn next Thursday afternoon.

The Infant St. John



(From the painting by Piero di Cosimo at the Metropolitan Museum.)

The Royal Academy

A Conservative Show. With Some Liberal Episodes
By Warre B. Wells

LONDON, May 5.—There are, an English critic observes, many ways in which you can write about the Royal Academy, whose annual exhibition opened at Burlington House this week. You can treat it as a joke, for instance, but that has been a little overdone. Or you can praise it as the great nursing mother of British art; but that stamps you at once as a Philistine. Or you can abuse it as an organized conspiracy for the discouragement of original talent; but that again has become a little ordinary. Or, again, you can take it as you find it. It is, perhaps, by such a process of elimination that this year's exhibition has been gently treated by the critics. If there are very few remarkable or unconventional pictures hung, the general opinion is that this is not due to the traditional prejudices or artistic timidity of the Academy itself, but to the fact that no great or adventurous

movement exists which, whether better or worse than the old British art, ought to have a place in a national exhibition. One critic complains that examples of it are "isolated like lepers"; but it is at least equally possible that the segregation implies a recognition that the Academy, if it is to be representative without injuring pictures of different kinds by incongruous juxtaposition, must aim at some kind of division into schools or tendencies.

A feature of the exhibition, to use an Irishism, is the progressive disappearance of subject pictures. A Clutton-Brock, a foremost English art critic, advances more or less seriously the suggestion that the "movies" have killed the old Academy picture. "When you can see the Queen of Sheba's whole imaginary and moving history," he asks, "why paint one frozen moment of it?" The picture of the year ought traditionally to be a subject picture, and, if possible, a "problem picture." But in this exhibition there is no such thing. Even the Hon. John Collier, who can usually be counted on for a "problem picture," fails to provide one this time. In name, at least, "The Royal Marriage," by Richard Jack, is a subject picture, but it might well be any marriage in Westminster Abbey. Sir John Lavery had an easier task with "The Wedding Procession" outdoors.

The place of honor in the exhibition is given to John Sargent's "Some General Officers of the Great War"—summed up by one critic as "a row of distinguished soldiers, all in khaki and all doing nothing except standing to be painted." There is only one prominent war picture, and that is an after-war picture, "The Arrival of the Canadian Corps on the Rhine," by Sheldon Williams. It received nothing like the attention that it would have gained a year or two ago. In sculpture the war is very prominent, but, judging by the attitude of the crowd, this country is very little interested in plastic art.

The most interesting paintings are the portraits, among which there are some notable studies. For the first time Augustus John exhibits portraits in the Academy—another sign that, though there may still be mutterings in the studios of Chelsea, the breach between the Academy and the "advanced" schools is repaired. Outstanding among the John portraits is his "Bernard Shaw," a tremendous study of the author as the Devil's Disciple, or even as Mephistopheles himself. Sargent, who reappears as a portrait painter, aside from his group of generals, has a portrait of Lady Rockingham, but this is overshadowed by Charles Sims's more striking study of Lady Rockingham and her little son, which is half a portrait and half an idyll. Sir William Orpen has six portraits, of which the best is "Sir Charles Villiers Stanford."

Every year, it is estimated, 12,000 pictures are submitted to the Academy. This year 1,464 were selected for hanging. Even after the first selection it was found, as usual, that, for reasons of size and arrangement, about a hundred of the chosen pictures could not be hung. For the benefit of those artists whose work was accepted and then thrown out at the last moment, Gordon Selfridge is this year staging the usual "overflow Academy."

Probably nowhere so well as at the

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Royal Academy is English conservatism so clearly and convincingly displayed. Now, as ever, it is the portrait of a well known face, the picture which tells a simple story, that most attracts attention. Painters who attempt to escape from tradition or who insist on their own individuality before anything else are suspect, by the public if not so much now by the Academy itself.

Chopin

A Monument to Him Modeled for Warsaw

ROME, May 10.—Although it is ten years since Wladyslaw Szymanowski, the Polish sculptor, won the competition for a commemorative statue to Chopin to be erected in Warsaw, the completed work has never been cast and it is still in the sculptor's studio in Cracow awaiting the decision of the Chopin committee. This competition was held in 1912, just two years before the great war started, and sixty prominent Polish sculptors entered their models. The committee was an international one, including Bartolomeo and Ferrari. The prize was awarded to Szymanowski, then living in Paris. He had studied in France and, as a young artist of twenty-five, had won the gold medal at the Paris exhibition. Soon after he forebore painting to devote his entire time to sculpture.

The artist himself, who for the last six months has been living in Rome for the purpose of attending to the casting of some statues, candidly admitted that it was the greatest disappointment to him that Chopin's statue, which is ready to be cast, is still stored away in his studio at Cracow. "The war has changed many things for many people, but for sculptors who won competitions just before the great event it has been disastrous. I have put years of work into my Chopin statue, which I consider my dearest possession, and by the change of conditions the committee cannot yet arrange for its casting."

The statue represents Chopin sitting on a bench, listening to the soothing of the wind through the willow tree which stands to one side of the seat. The willow is considered the typical tree in Poland, and according to Szymanowski, the music of Chopin is like the music of the wind through the willow. Chopin's music, he thinks, was conceived when he first heard the whisperings of the trees. The plan of the original committee was to erect the monument in the park at Warsaw, with a huge fountain base underneath and a circle of willow trees as a background. Ultimately there is no doubt that this scheme will be worked out, but it looks as if considerable time would elapse first.

At the Milch gallery the summer exhibition is made up of a diversity of types. It ranges from George Bellows—in a strong portrait of a child—to George De Forest Brush, represented on this occasion by one of his Indian subjects, painted on an unusually large scale. The figure divides honors with landscape, Jonas Lie and Walter Ufer, Gardner Symons and Ivan Olin, Willard Metcalf and Childe Hassam, are among the twenty-five or thirty artists who exhibit. They leave altogether an animated and interesting impression.

The City Club this time shifts to etchings. Which perhaps is an indication of the waning season. It is nevertheless quite as interesting and well arranged as the preceding exhibitions in oils. Several of the best known men each has a little group of characteristic subject. The largest is the series of six shipping plates by Frederick K. Dettweiler. Made during the period of war stress they show the fervid activity incident to the construction of the fleet of wooden ocean carriers. All are quite monotonous in their gray ground. Though broken by a strong, formful technique they lack, however, something subtle and binding. Mahonri Young's mesa prints are distinguished by their comprehensive observations. "The Approaching Storm," more accelerated than the "Juniper Tree," more accelerated poetically qualities in the Indian herd girl. The environment is richly enunciated in a broad landscape, lowering sky and moving flocks of goats. Troy Kinney also is here with a group in complete character. His dancers always are spirited fragments. Such is his "Prince Igor." Another "specialist" is Frank W. Benson. His flying geese and similar sporting subjects have a familiar and alluring appeal even to the uninitiated. There is life in them and suspense. Other contributors are Theodore Blum, who has a Holland series, Sears Gallagher and John R. Barclay.

The latest catalogue we have received from abroad is one issued by Messrs. Knight, Frank and Rutley, for the sale which is to take place at Cassiobury Park, Watford, in Hertfordshire, on June 12, and nine other days in the same month. It runs to more than 2,500 numbers. Judging from the illustrations the furniture is of some importance. Among the paintings works by Lely are especially conspicuous. Examples of Holbein, Reynolds, Van Dyck, Morland and so on are also listed. There is a laudatory passage on

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(From the painting by El Greco at the Metropolitan Museum.)

a more sympathetic writer on art than Sir Martin Conway. He never puts himself above his subject. His purpose is merely to interest readers in the things of art he loves. Incidentally he supplies us with just the information that enables us to visualize the old masters and the conditions under which they exercised their remarkable

duties. The guild entered into and influenced every relation of the workman's life, and it is impossible to discuss any subject connected with medieval industry without considering the guilds.